

Message from Hieronymos, Archbishop of Athens

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Questo tema è di primaria importanza e sta al cuore della vita spirituale ortodossa. Come nessuno viene al mondo senza un padre *naturale*, così nessuno può esistere spiritualmente senza un padre *spirituale*

XVI INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL CONFERENCE

*Message of his Beatitude,
Archbishop Ieronymos
of Athens and All Greece
to The Sixteenth Annual Bose Conference
on Orthodox Spirituality*

It is a pleasure for me, through this message, to greet all those participating in the Sixteenth Annual Bose Conference on Orthodox Spirituality, which this year is dedicated to the role of the Spiritual Father in Orthodoxy.

This theme is of paramount importance and lies at the very core of Orthodox spiritual life. Just as one does not come into existence without a *physical* father, no one can exist spiritually without a *spiritual* father. And just as the physical father dedicates himself to his children, caring for their development and progress, actively participating in their education and formation, so too, to a much greater degree, the spiritual father participates in, and indeed is responsible before God, for the spiritual growth, progress and formation of his spiritual sons and daughters. He is the spiritual guide, *par excellence*, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, unerring and having the gift of the discernment of spirits. He it is who leads his spiritual children away from many and various traps that the devil has spread upon the earth and guides them along the straight and narrow path leading to eternal life. Indeed, the spiritual Father, rooted in the unerring foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets, transmits to his spiritual children his experience of *theosis*, i. e. his experiential knowledge of God. Hence, spiritual life is unimaginable in Orthodoxy without the existence of the Spiritual Father or ??????????, for it is he who begets the divine life in the believer and guides him to develop and grow in the life of the Spirit through the Sacred Mysteries of the Church.

The institution of the Spiritual Father, which constitutes the axis around which Orthodox spiritual life revolves, has been an integral part of Church life from its very inception and is a topic for fruitful study and lends itself to analysis from various viewpoints. As your Conference undertakes this task, may I humbly note that the theme in question is to be approached and touched upon prayerfully and within the experience of the life in Christ. Indeed one should never lose sight of the fact that it is to **the enlightenment of the Spiritual Father and to his spiritual judgement** that an Ecumenical Council, *the highest authority in the Church*, the Quinisext Ecumenical Council, through its 102nd Canon, entrusts the healing of the sinful penitent by either applying penance precisely as prescribed by the Holy Canons (?????????) or by employing ?????????? in the administering of the necessary "spiritual medicines" for the healing of the soul.

With these simple thoughts in mind, I once again greet all of you with love our Lord Jesus Christ and wish you all success in your Conference as you labour to forge stronger bonds of unity and understanding by putting forth the spiritual Traditions of the Holy Orthodox Church.

With love in Christ,

+ Ieronymos

Archbishop of Athens and All Greece